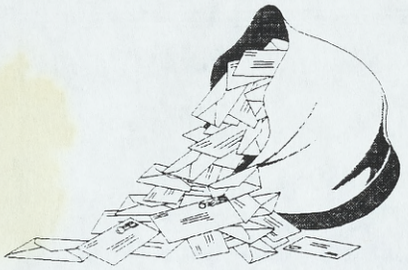

Lambda Letters Project

32585

Vol. 5, No. 1 January, 1997 www.humboldt1.com/~mamurphy/lambdaletters LambdaLP@aol.com (916) 965-6851

Can Gay Marriages Last?

Lavender Library, Archives
and Cultural Exchange
Sacramento, CA

Sure they can! The traditional stereotype that gays can't form lasting relationships just isn't true. Larry and I have been together for over 26 years. Our good friends Stan and Bill recently celebrated their 46th anniversary. I know three other couples who were together for 25 years. Sadly, two of those relationships ended when one of the partners died, but the other marriage is still going strong. In addition, as you will see in our Lavender Valentines section for this month, Lambda Letters' very own members Mimi and Elizabeth have been together for 15 years. Also, members Sabrina and Susan are celebrating their 7th anniversary this month. Congratulations women!

So what makes a relationship work? I am certainly not a qualified therapist so you must read on at you own risk. Here are some of my ideas.

1. **It doesn't take a saint.** For example, I'm a workaholic. I get irritated when interrupted while I'm working. I get antsy when watching situation comedies on TV; I could be doing something useful. Larry likes life on the lighter side. He's not always thrilled at all the work we do. I go through periods

Continued on page 6

Board Members Needed

Lambda Letters will be holding its 1997 annual members meeting on Saturday, April 19th, in Sacramento. The exact time and place will be announced in our February newsletter. Each year at the annual meeting we hold elections to add new members to the Lambda Letters Board of Directors. A formal call for nominations to the board will be included in your February newsletter. In the mean time, we urge you to consider running for the board yourself, or talk with your friends about their running for the board.

Lambda Letters delivered almost 48,000 letters in 1996 and we did that with a bare-bones group of board members and staff. With the new, more liberal State Legislature we have a golden opportunity to pass some very important legislation needed by our community. (Now we even have an out lesbian, Sheila Kuehl, in the leadership of the State Assembly!) The bills we could get passed might include clarifying and strengthening the right of people with AIDS to use marijuana for medical purposes; getting a stronger law to protect lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgendered persons from employment and

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Lambda Letters Progress Report

Letters Collected

November, 1996	2,288 letters
In all of 1996	48,149 letters

Dollars Spent

November, 1996	$3,221
In all of 1996	$22,108

Can You Help?

Please support the very important work of the Lambda Letters Project with your contributions.

The Lambda Letters Newsletter is published monthly except in December by the Lambda Letters Project Inc.,
6212 Silverton Way, Carmichael, CA 95608.
Postmaster: send address changes to the address above.

Lambda Letters Project

Statement of Purpose

To promote people of color, feminist, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and HIV/AIDS status advocacy, and to bring people of color, women, lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgendered persons, and persons affected by or living with HIV/AIDS into full participation in the mainstream of American society now, exercising all the privileges and responsibilities thereof.

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Confidentiality

The Lambda Letters Project does not sell or loan its mailing list to anyone. We give no information about who is, or is not, a member of the Project. We do, occasionally, send mailings on behalf of other worthwhile organizations, but this is done by our own volunteers so that no other organization has the opportunity to copy our mailing lists.

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(*Actual cost to LLP for you to receive 44 letters in one year.)

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Women's Issue

Mixed Success with Violence Against Women Act

For many, the strongest victory for women's rights in the 104th Congress was the more than full funding for most of the Violence Against Women Act programs. There was an increase of $12.8 million for battered women's shelter construction while the National Domestic Violence Hotline received $1.2 million—nearly three times the previous year's funding amount! Rape prevention and education programs were approved for $35 million, an increase of about $6.5 million over the last fiscal year. In addition, STOP grants received a $15 million increase at $145 million—to be used for local programs combating domestic violence, $33 million to encourage arrest policies (up $5 million), and $17.5 million for a national stalker reduction program (up $2.5 million).

On the downside, state and federal judges' training programs are still unfunded—which they have been since the act was passed in 1994. Because there remains a great deal of ignorance and bias against women in our judicial system, especially concerning domestic violence, this lack of funding is very serious. Batterers are still getting physical custody of children in many divorces, despite research showing that children have a 40–60 percent chance of being abused if the parent was abusive to his or her partner. Other unjust or dangerous decisions are routinely being made by judges who simply are unaware of the true nature and consequences of family violence, rape, and sexual assault.

This month's letter is directed to Senators Feinstein and Boxer, thanking them for their support of Violence Against Women Act programs, and urging them to continue their support by addressing the critical need for funding of state and federal judges' training. Justice isn't being served as long as old ideas and stereotypes about women's behavior persist in the courtroom. Please sign this month's letter and show your support for survivors of abuse.

Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual Issue

Battle for Same-Sex Marriage in Hawaii Passes Another Hurdle

On December 3rd of last year, a state judge in Hawaii ruled that officials are prohibited from refusing marriage licenses to same-sex couples. While this is cause for celebration for all who believe in equal treatment under the laws for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people, we cannot forget that there are further battles ahead of us before we can claim final victory by proclaiming the words "I do!" in Hawaii—much less seeing that those words, spoken in Hawaii, are honored back here in California and by federal agencies.

As attorney Dan Foley (who argued the plaintiffs' case before Judge Kevin Chang) stated in an interview in the December 6th issue of the *Washington Blade*, "If it were just the court case, I'd be really celebrating, because I have no doubt that Judge Chang's decision will be affirmed. But ... it's so difficult to compete with the organization and resources of the religious right, who have a lot of money and a lot of organization. And we're just sort of a rag tag group of volunteers."

While the state's appeal of Judge Chang's decision will most likely be upheld by the Hawaii Supreme Court (Judge Chang issued a stay on his decision the day following his initial ruling to provide a chance for appeal), opponents of same-sex marriage in Hawaii are not giving up hope of ultimately preventing marriage between lesbian and gay couples.

Continued on page 5

Deborah A. Brooks
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AIDS Issue

President Clinton's Attack on Doctors

Last November the voters of California voted to pass Proposition 215. This proposition permitted people to cultivate and possess small amounts of marijuana for medicinal purposes when prescribed by a physician to alleviate suffering from a medical condition. Proposition 215 was approved by 56 percent of the voters.

On December 30th the White House Drug Czar, Barry McCaffrey, announced that the federal government will help prosecute doctors who prescribe marijuana for medical purposes. He also said the federal government will revoke the licenses of these doctors to prescribe medicine. That would effectively destroy their careers.

There has been some confusion about the ability of the federal government to do this. Although the California Medical Board issues the licenses to doctors to practice medicine in California, their licenses to prescribe medications are issued by the DEA, a federal agency.

Doctors in California can alleviate immense pain and suffering among many of their patients by prescribing marijuana. However, they may now be too frightened to help their patients in this way. Please write to President Clinton, urging him to back off and allow doctors to decide what is the best treatment for their patients.

Have you experienced employment discrimination because of your actual or perceived sexual orientation? If so, you may register a complaint with one of the following Division of Labor Standards Enforcement district offices.

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Stockton	209-948-7770
Van Nuys	818-901-5312
Ventura	805-654-4538

*These cities share an office.

People of Color Issue

Fight the Attack on Good Bilingual Education

The controversy over the Oakland School Board's decision to recognize Black English as a separate language has brought the issue of bilingual education into national prominence. In California, because of its incredible diversity, bilingual education has been a matter of political concern for years. The Lambda Letters Project is asking its members to write to Senator Leroy Greene, Chair of the Senate Education Committee, asking him to oppose S.B. 6 (introduced by Sen. Alpert, D–San Diego). This is the latest attempt to weaken the existing laws that ensure that students who speak English as a secondary language receive their core course instruction in their primary language.

The Alpert-Firestone Bilingual Education Reform Act of 1997, as stated in S.B. 6, essentially eliminates the existing requirement that instruction in the core academic courses be given in a child's primary language. Under S.B. 6, school districts could opt to use the "double immersion" method of instruction in these core subjects. In these double immersion classes, students with limited English proficiency would receive instruction in both English and their primary language simultaneously.

Lambda Letters questions this approach. It is difficult enough for students to grasp the complex ideas presented in their core academic courses without having to grapple with these ideas in a relatively unfamiliar language. This politically appealing method just sets the student up for failure.

S.B. 6 also allows school districts to choose "early exit" bilingual programs. This option would allow school districts to transition all limited English-speaking students to all-English instruction at an early stage of the educational process, regardless of the individual student's capacity to understand English. S.B. 6 is simply a misguided effort to move limited English-speaking students into English instruction as quickly as possible, without sufficient regard to the goal of academic excellence. Please write to Senator Greene opposing this bill.

Battle for Same-Sex Marriage

Continued from page 3

There is growing support within Hawaii for an amendment to that state's constitution to undo the court's decision. (After all, the plaintiffs challenged the *state* constitution's equal protection clause, not the U.S. Constitution's equal protection clause.) While many believe a Constitutional amendment will be a tough sell in the moderate political climate within the state of Hawaii, it is not outside the realm of possibility and would entirely undo the court rulings.

Attorney Foley noted in his interview that the local organizations working on the same-sex project "need help in the community, in the media and in the state legislature." Well, members of the Lambda Letters Project can certainly do our part! While we can't really expect to have much influence with the Hawaii legislature, we can reach out to the Hawaii community and to the media.

The people of Hawaii need to be reminded that allowing same-sex marriage would not hurt the state's image, but only enhance it. They need to be reminded that allowing same-sex marriage would further the cause of civil and human rights within our community. They need to be reminded that this would cause tourism to increase as lesbians, gays, and their family and friends travel to the state to perform wedding ceremonies and enjoy vacations and honeymoons.

Please write to the following and make the above points along with adding your own thoughts:

Hawaii Visitor's Bureau
2270 Kalakaua Avenue
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Honolulu Advertiser
Letters to the Editor
PO Box 3110
Honolulu, HI 96802

Governor Ben Cayetano
State Capitol
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Enclosed with this newsletter is a sample letter addressed to the Hawaii Visitor's Bureau. You may use this letter as a model to craft your own letters or simply sign the enclosed letter. Either way, please return your letters to us in the enclosed envelop and we will see that they are delivered.

G/L/B/T Lawyers Win Support from Bar

The California State Bar has agreed to work toward the eradication of sexual-orientation discrimination in the workplace. The State Bar's Board of Governors approved a resolution stating its commitment to the issue after it received a report indicating that sexual-orientation bias exists in the legal community. It is believed that the California State Bar is the first state bar to study and formally commit itself to obtaining equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered attorneys. This action apparently follows an August resolution by the American Bar Association, which asked all state bar associations to study the issue of sexual-orientation bias and make appropriate recommendations to eliminate this bias.

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Gay Marriages Lasting

Continued from page 1

when I'm really anxious about things, such as Lambda Letters. I'm not much fun to live with at those times. And yet we value our love and have worked our way through the bad periods.

2. **You have to want the relationship.** I knew from day one that I wanted to marry and settle down. But—surprise, surprise—the mate I wanted was a man, not a woman. If you really don't want marriage, don't let someone else talk you into it. It won't work if your heart isn't in it.

3. **Find a good model.** Use it for guidance in building your own relationship. My parents were my model. They were far from perfect, and they had significant problems, but they cared enough to work through them. Their very imperfections helped me as Larry and I dealt with our own conflicts and flaws. My parents did it and that meant Larry and I could do it too. If your parents just won't do as a model, build an inter-generational family within our own community. Older couples can add richness to the texture of life and provide real inspiration as you face the very real difficulties in making a relationship work.

4. **Join or build support groups.** Form friendships with people and groups who will support and affirm your relationship. Again, I was lucky with my parents. I didn't meet Larry until I was thirty-two. (I often chastise him for not calling me up sooner and telling me where he was!) My parents were obviously concerned. They were afraid I would live a life of loneliness. However, they were relieved when they got to know Larry. They knew he was good for me. Your parents might feel the same way if you give them the chance.

If your parents just won't provide the support you need, look for couples groups within the gay community, or build friendships with older gay couples. Join MCC or other groups and churches that will affirm and celebrate your relationship.

Frankly, I've found that simply being open about my relationship, and expecting others to support and affirm it, has been enough to get that respect. I have been out to my family since the 1960s. Larry and I have been out at work, in church, and everywhere else since about 1980. Everywhere we go people know that we are a couple. There have been a few exceptions, but almost always people have been very supportive. That has meant a lot to us.

Board Members Needed

Continued from page 1

housing discrimination; establishing the right of same-sex couples to marry and to adopt children; and so on.

In order to take advantage of this opportunity, however, we must have a larger, stronger board of directors. Without a larger staff and board we may lose the opportunity to persuade the Legislature to pass the important bills that we need. Please consider this very seriously. When the formal call for nominations to the board goes out next month, please seriously consider nominating yourself or a friend. Then you or your friend can be a vital part of making this a better world for all of us.

Lavender Valentines

Mimi & Elizabeth	15 years
Sabrina & Susan	7 years

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5. **Design your own family.** Larry and I have a monogamous marriage. That arrangement is a lot less complicated than an open relationship or one of more than two people. But I am a great believer in doing what is right for you. I have known threesomes and open relationships that have worked just fine.

In closing let me say that I know gay marriages can last and can be beautiful. Don't let the homophobes persuade you otherwise.

Boyce Hinman, Administrator

More on Possible CIA Drug Connection

The *New York Times* recently reported that a federal grand jury has indicted a Venezuelan general who led a CIA counternarcotics program that put one ton of cocaine on America's streets. General Ramon Guillen Davila was the chief of a program set up by the CIA in the late 1980s—in conjunction with the Venezuelan national guard—seeking to infiltrate Colombian gangs shipping cocaine to the United States.

According to the *New York Times*, the CIA, over the objections of the Drug Enforcement Administration, approved the shipment of at least one ton of cocaine to Miami Airport as a way of gathering information on the Colombian drug cartels. But the cocaine ended up on the streets because of "poor judgment and management on the part of several CIA officers," the intelligence agency said.

One CIA officer, Mark McFarlin, resigned after an internal investigation, and the agency's station chief in Venezuela was recalled to Washington. This is the only known instance in which the CIA has acknowledged that its actions led to illegal drugs being imported into the United States. Did it happen more than once? Congressmember Maxine Waters is pressing for a thorough investigation of the matter. Those investigations could result in disclosures of additional incidents of this type.

Kuehl, Bustamante in High Positions

In an astounding victory for her and the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities, Assemblymember Sheila Kuehl has been chosen as Speaker Pro Tem of the California State Assembly, making her second in command of the Assembly. She will preside over the Assembly whenever the Speaker is not on the floor of the House. Kuehl was chosen on December 2nd, the first day of the new legislative session. She is the first woman to fill the position and is certainly the first out lesbian to do so. Her selection is in recognition of the great intelligence and skill that she has demonstrated during her time in the Assembly.

Another first occurred when Cruz Bustamante was chosen as Assembly Speaker. This is the first time that a Latino has been elected to this high position, often described as the second most powerful position in state government. Hopefully the selection of these two people for high office will advance the cause of the communities served by LLP.

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Domestic Abuse, Our Hidden Shame

Many people say that the emotional dynamics of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender relationships are the same as straight relationships. Unfortunately, this similarity can be illustrated by the existence of domestic violence in same-sex relationships. Susan Holt of the Los Angeles Gay & Lesbian Center estimates that between 25–33 percent of all same-sex relationships may be marred by sometimes lethal domestic violence. That's about the same percentage as in straight marriages. She estimates that there are one million lesbian and gay victims of spousal abuse nationwide.

Recently a coalition of domestic abuse agencies that serve the queer community released a report of g/l/b/t domestic abuse cases reported to them in 1995. According to them, 347 cases were reported in San Francisco and 330 in San Diego during that year. The report noted that these figures probably greatly understate the problem.

Lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgendered people face special problems as they attempt to deal with abuse from their partners. The police sometimes ignore complaints of same-sex abuse, dismissing them as just a case of "boys will be boys," or as a "cat fight." The most famous example of this is the Jeffrey Dahmer case in which police ignored a young man's plea for help. The youth was later killed by Dahmer. In addition, when a straight woman is abused, she can often find safety in a battered women's shelter. But a lesbian entering such a shelter may find that her abuser follows her there. A straight man being abused by his wife can often escape the violence by leaving home. An abused gay man who leaves home may find that his lover follows him and continues the abuse.

Same-sex domestic abuse is prohibited by California law. The law prohibits domestic abuse between married people, unmarried people living together or who had lived together, and between people in a dating relationship or who had been in a dating relationship. The law covers both straight couples and same-sex couples.

Shireen Miles of Sacramento's W.E.A.V.E. says it's important for gay people who are abused by their partners to tell police of the true nature of the relationship. She says abuse between unrelated people is a misdemeanor. When it occurs between partners, lovers, or spouses it is a felony. That's much more effective in stopping the abuse. Also, with misdemeanor abuse, the police must actually see it occur before they can make an arrest. With felony abuse, they don't have to see it occur in order to make the arrest.

Miles says that when police ignore a complaint of domestic abuse, the offended party should contact the county district attorney's office to get a restraining order. This can be obtained without an attorney. It is free in many counties, but may cost up to $100 in some. If the abuse occurs again, and the abused party shows the restraining order to the police, they are required to take action.

Of course, none of this should have to happen in the first place. Couples who are having problems should seek professional counseling. They will be much the happier and safer for having done so.

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Fund-Raising Committee Progress Report

Last fall we called for volunteers to help produce a fund-raising and awards dinner to be held in mid-February. We were ecstatic when almost forty people volunteered to do one task or another to help put on the event. Twelve people volunteered to attend a meeting to plan the dinner. Despite scheduling several meetings since then, we have never gotten more than half that number to attend. There is no way we can plan and produce a major fund-raiser with so few volunteers. Yet we need to produce several events in order to fuel the continued growth of the Project.

In 1996 Lambda Letters collected almost 48,000 letters. That was a marvelous accomplishment. We think those letters played a major role in defeating the anti-same-sex marriage bills in our State Legislature. With the new liberal majority in the Legislature, we have a golden opportunity to advance the legislative agenda of our communities.

Lambda Letters is the most cost-effective lobbying effort of our community in California and perhaps the nation. We have no paid employees and we spend less than fifty cents for every letter we deliver to your legislators. That's tiny considering that it includes the cost of postage, stationery, printer cartridges, creating and printing the newsletter, etc. But to continue to increase your influence over your elected officials, Lambda Letters must continue to grow and that costs money. We desperately need an effective, functioning fund-raising committee. Please consider lending your hand to the most important work of this committee. Let us know that you can help us in this way. Call us at (916) 965-6851 or send us a note with your letters.

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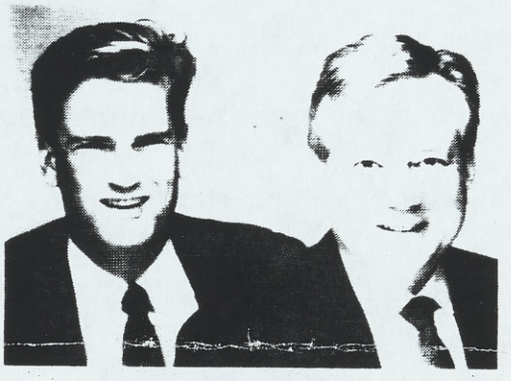

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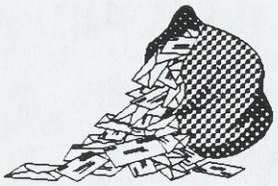

Can You Answer These Questions?

1. Who was the first lesbian ordained by a major religious denomination?

2. What was the first state to enact a statewide gay rights law?

3. Who was the first to introduce a bill in Congress to ban discrimination based on sexual orientation?

4. Which nation was the first to legalize gay and lesbian marriages?

5. In what year was the first International Gay Games held?

6. In what year did the Stonewall riots occur?

You can find the answer to these and many other fascinating questions in the Lambda Letters 1997 Calendar of Lesbian and Gay History. Please support the work of the Lambda Letters Project by ordering your calendar today. At just $7.95 per copy they are a steal and they make ideal holiday gifts for all your friends.

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